

Reviews. Reports

Recenzje. Sprawozdania

ROKSANA M. ZDUNEK

Review of: Jean M. Twenge, *iGen. Dlaczego dzieciaki dorastające w sieci są mniej zbuntowane, bardziej tolerancyjne, mniej szczęśliwe – i zupełnie nieprzygotowane do dorosłości – i co to oznacza dla nas wszystkich* [*iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us*], Smak Słowa, Sopot 2019, pp. 376

The reviewed book *iGen. Dlaczego dzieciaki dorastające w sieci są mniej zbuntowane, bardziej tolerancyjne, mniej szczęśliwe – i zupełnie nieprzygotowane do dorosłości – i co to oznacza dla nas wszystkich* (the book was originally published in 2017 by the Atria publishing house entitled *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us*), by Jean M. Twenge, focuses on the issue of the influence of social media on shaping the perception of a highly digital generation, which is entering adulthood right now. The intensive use of social media is one of the hallmarks of modern youth, which affects all spheres of their lives, making them significantly different from previous generations of young people. “Digital natives”, “Generation Z”, “Post-millennials”, “Generation C”, “Generation XD” – these are terms that appear more and more often in the public discourse, emphasizing the inextricable, even sacramental, relationship of young people and technology. The publication perpetuates the *iGen* label introduced in 2006 (in the book *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are*

More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before by Jean M. Twenge), indicating that “it is concise, extensive and relatively neutral at the same time” [Twenge 2019: 15]. The letter “i” in the name highlights three important identification marks of this generation: individualism, iPhone and I (within the meaning of “me”).

The adopted methodological strategy is based mainly on the secondary data analysis supplemented by in-depth individual interviews. The author organizes and collates the available knowledge about the views of young Americans over the years. For this purpose, four sources available on the Internet are used: Monitoring the Future (MtF), Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), American Freshman (AF) and General Social Survey (GSS). The implication of these sources provided qualitative data: representativeness on a national scale (MtF, YRBSS, GSS) and for a specific cohort (AF), a high response rate and many years of execution tradition (e.g. AF from 1966), which makes it possible to show the cultural change. Already in the title of the book, the author asks the main research question, which successfully is answered in the following chapters of the publication. In order to capture the differences resulting from a generation change or a change of epoch, the researcher uses for some issues the innovative age-period-cohort (APC) analysis based on hierarchical linear modeling. For instance, due to it, Twenge noticed that changes in behavior more often result from a generational change, while changes in attitudes are more often related to a change of epoch (the change equally affects people of different ages).

Twenge’s book consists of ten chapters. It begins with an introduction, in which the author recalls the story of Athena, a representative of iGen. The respondent reminisces about her vacation in a bitter words: “I’d rather sit with my phone watching Netflix, than with my family. That’s what I’ve been doing most of the summer. I spent more time on the phone than with people” [Twenge 2019: 9]. This quote tells a lot about young people and is an entrance to the book, which, i.a., explains this state of affairs. In the introduction, the author presents the concept of the division of society into generations, provides cut-off dates for individual generations, gives the most important features of iGen, explains the name adopted for the generation, and characterizes the data sources used in the research.

The individual chapters cover different areas of teenagers’ lives. Chapter 1 focuses on the immaturity of young Americans and their leisurely process of growing up. The maturity indicators include, for example, driving license, dating, sex, work and drugs. Chapter 2 is a story about youth’s relationship with the media, which devastatingly illustrates that social media is one of basic and indispensable elements of their life. The author also thoroughly analyzes iGen’s connections with other types of media: press, books, television, radio, cinema and games. Chapter 3 (“In Person No More: I’m With You, But Only Virtually”) discusses interpersonal relationships, where the role of media-mediated communication is emphasized. Chapter 4 focuses on the mental condition of young people (which, to put it mildly, is not good). It is

very important from the perspective of psychologists, educators and parents. A certain discrepancy can be seen here, “because nowadays the Internet, and in particular the society, promotes constant positivity” [Twenge 2019: 108]. Flores emphasizes a similar problem in the book *Facehooked: How Facebook Affects Our Emotions, Relationships, and Lives*, which indicates a number of mental disorders that young social media users may struggle with [Flores 2014]. Chapter 5 shows the perspective of youth in terms of religion, and Chapter 6 highlights the importance of security in young people’s lives. iGen members do not like to take risks, use alcohol less often than previous generations and want to feel everywhere as safe as at home. Chapter 7 describes the functioning of young people in the labor market and their increasing income insecurity. Chapter 8 covers the issues of starting a family, having children and marriage. In this chapter, the author points out that the individualism of young people is an obstacle in creating a relationship with another person, and starting a family is associated with a significant financial challenge. Chapter 9 put the widely discussed topic of diversity & inclusion forward (focusing on LGBT, gender and race). Youth’s attitude to these issues is unequivocal: “they expect equality – representatives of this generation are often surprised or even shocked when faced with prejudices” [Twenge 2019: 257].

From the perspective of political science, the most interesting seems to be Chapter 11 entitled “Independent: Politics”, in which Twenge analyzes the views, expectations and political preferences of young people. The chapter presents youth’s perspective on important social issues such as: legalizing marijuana, legalizing abortion, the death penalty and controlling access to weapons. Twenge also focuses on political participation, distrust of political parties and institutions and fatigue with political elites. Interestingly for a media scholar, chapter also discusses iGen’s sources of political knowledge. The topic that resonates the most, however, is polarization. As the data cited by the author show, fewer and fewer people define their views as moderate. Twenge notes that “political apathy and political polarization may have the same cause: the internet” [Twenge 2019: 322].

The author is not sequestered in this opinion. A similar thought was shared by Barack Obama: “Nowadays, one of the greatest challenges facing our democracy is how much the basic facts that we operate vary. More and more people draw information from social media and, through algorithms, start living in a bubble. This is partly why our political scene is so divided right now” [Letterman 2018]. The Polish political scientist and sociologist Radosław Marzęcki also draws attention to the same dominant trends emerging when researching young people’s relationships with politics in Poland: polarization of views, a decline in trust in institutions and political elites [Marzęcki 2017]. Importantly, the researcher comparing Polish data with data from other political cultures (the Netherlands and the United States), shows that the level of youth’s democratic enthusiasm decreases with the age of the respondents [Marzęcki 2017]. On the other hand, Roberto S. Foa and Yascha Mounk even suggest a *generational reversal* [Foa, Mounk 2016: 8].

The great value of the publication is its interdisciplinary nature, whereby it can gain a wide audience. Although the book is written by a psychologist, it offers potential for many other social disciplines, e.g. social communication and media sciences (providing knowledge about social media users and the media's influence on social reality), political sciences (presenting the image of citizens and politics of the future) and sociological sciences (shows social change). The topicality of the research subject and the friendly language, thanks to which the content will be easily assimilated by the reader not only associated with the world of science, is also an asset. Twenge creates a kind of storytelling about contemporary young Americans with a theoretical foundations and explanation of psychological concepts (e.g. FOMO, narcissism, PTSD).

A very important aspect of the text is that the author is not categorical in her argument. Despite citing a lot of disturbing data about the young generation, Jean M. Twenge is far from antagonizing or evaluating, which is an indisputable advantage of the publication. She even defends iGen, writing in the end: "the Internet generation is afraid and even terrified. They grow up slowly, raised in such a way as to value security, they are terrified by the implications of economic inequalities, and what's more – they mature at a time when the main form of social activity is staring at a small rectangular screen where you can be liked or rejected" [Twenge 2019: 350]. By quoting the statements of iGen representatives, enriched with the social background of the respondents, the author adds a human dimension to the chapters filled with statistical data and graphs. Another asset of the publication is that the analysis is not limited to one generation only – the researcher shows, by comparing data from different years (so-called *time-lag studies*), how far their views are from the beliefs of older generations. Thus, it proves that among digitized young people different trends and beliefs prevail, and one of the factors strongly influencing this state of affairs is social media.

Foreign readers may be disappointed by stopping analyzes within the United States. The limitation is justified because the shaping of a generation, more than the age of birth, is influenced by certain cultural and economic conditions of a given country, which is for example, the scale of availability of new communication technologies. Comparisons to Europe as a whole seem to be overly generalizing, as for instance in this case of religiosity: "In Europe, half of the population is denying religion and many churches are standing empty" [Twenge 2019: 161]. No source was indicated and Europe is, in my opinion, too broad benchmark, highly varied within its borders.

Jean M. Twenge is a professor in the Department of Psychology at San Diego State University, specializing in research on the modern generation of young people. The author's scientific achievements indicate her extensive substantive background, enabling a comprehensive discussion of the issue. She is the author of many publications in this area, including: *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*

[Twenge 2006], *Trends in U.S. Adolescents' Media Use, 1976–2016: The Rise of Digital Media, the Decline of TV, and the (Near) Demise of Print* [Twenge, Martin, Spitzberg 2019], *More Polarized but More Independent: Political Party Identification and Ideological Self-Categorization Among U.S. Adults, College Students, and Late Adolescents, 1970–2015* [Twenge et al. 2016].

To sum up, in addition to media researchers, psychologists and sociologists, the publication will be useful for parents, educators, leaders and members of iGen themselves. It will contribute to a better understanding of the needs, dreams and problems of young people – political, social and economic ones. The discussed book has also a value for the political elite – on the basis of the presented data, it is possible to forecast future patterns of political participation of citizens, assuming as an important factor the transformation of society and democracy resulting from the development of new technologies. It should be noted that the seeds of the American trends, problems and challenges described in this publication, where much attention is devoted to the presidential election in 2016, can be observed in contemporary Polish politics. One of them is the strong political polarization, therefore, the book can be treated as a certain announcement of changes and a reference point for conducting research in Poland. The book is a collection of valuable insights that allow us to get to know the generation of tomorrow even today.

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